Protecting Communities and the Environment: Fuels Management Conference

Landscape Scale Treatments

Issue Statement:

Small-scale uncoordinated treatments, not designed to an agreed strategic objective, are inadequate to protect and restore important ecological and social values, or protect against large-scale adverse wildfire effects to ecosystems and human communities.

Recommendation:

#1 Planning
Agency Land Management Plans need to reflect Large-Scale Treatment (LST) preferences across boundaries. In most cases, such plans must be developed collaboratively with all federal, state and local stakeholders.

We must develop integrated strategic plans and approaches for forest and rangeland restoration and vegetation management at appropriate and meaningful scales.

Timeline: Direction issued by June 1, 2004

- As Land Management Plans (LMP's) are revised, ensure disclosure and discussion of landscape-scale treatments across agency boundaries is included in the NEPA analysis. As each agency develops/revises LMP's, coordination with surrounding stakeholders needs to occur.
- As Fire Planning Units (FPU's) are developed over the next 1-4 years, incorporate landscape-level treatment units across agency boundaries.
- Small-scale treatments are strategically placed to link with other treatments for landscape-scale effects.

Who: Department and Agency Directors will give direction to Regional and State Office Planning Staff managing the revision of Land Management Plan's and development and review of proposed Fire Planning Units.

Rationale:
Local and regional land use and strategic plans should encourage LST within and across agency boundaries where applicable. Small-scale treatments that are strategically planned will contribute to landscape-level effects.

Recommendation:

#2 Target, Budgeting, and Operations

a) Restructure agency target incentives to encourage landscape level treatments to achieve strategic treatment objectives.
Timeline: 1-4 years (FPU development)
Who: Department and Agency Directors.
Rationale: agency targets and incentives get in the way of achieving strategic treatment objectives (targets on acreage-to-treat create incentives to treat the easiest acres at least cost and create disincentive to strategic treatments that are more difficult and of a higher cost.)

b) Develop a budget process that provides consistent, predictable funding levels. Landscape level multi-year projects are funded in whole from year one.
Timeline: FY05
Who: National and Regional Agency Directors
Rationale: fluctuating funding year-to-year makes program continuity a problem; and discourages long-range planning across a greater landscape.

c) Continue development of sophisticated weather and climate modeling to support landscape-scale implementation;
Timeline: On-going
Who: NFP Research and JFSP
Rationale: weather and climate complicates program continuity and predictability, especially in long duration LST events. Better prediction and forecasting tools, along with improved air quality modeling, will bolster the decision-making process for all fire management activities, including long-duration, landscape-scale treatments.

d) Develop agency and public support for acceptance of a wider range of fire effects from landscape-level treatments.
Timeline: 1-4 years with increased LST
Who: Researchers, Public Information Officers, Fire Ecologists, Agency Administrators, Line Officers, Resource Specialists
Rationale: Narrowly-defined objectives and short prescription windows limit the successful implementation of landscape-scale treatments over longer durations and multiple fuel characteristics. By having a greater range of acceptable fire effects, prescription windows can be enlarged to allow for longer, larger projects.

Recommendation:

#3 Coordination of Prescribed Fire Resources
Institute a Prescribed Fire (PF) level modeled after the PL (Suppression Planning Level) to move fuels resources where opportunities exist for LST.

Timeline: Annual Revision of Mobilization Guide(s) timed with revision of suppression PL protocols.

Who: NICC and GACCs, and National and Regional fuels managers

Rationale:
Fire management is no longer just suppression, and, with increased fuel management activities, it is an all-year occupation. Prescription and air quality windows are of short duration and resources need to be moved rapidly to areas where opportunities exist for fuel treatment, especially those on a landscape-level. There needs to be recognition that there is a finite supply of qualified firefighters and prescribed fire specialists. National resources, like Type 1 hotshot crews, should be considered available to be committed to high priority landscape-scale projects. Currently there is no national protocol for coordination and mobilization of prescribed fire resources. Mobilization of these resources is a lower priority than suppression needs.

Related Issues
Regulatory Compliance:

- Cultural Resources: lack of fire archeologists to conduct pre-project surveys, implementation monitoring, and post-project assessments. Either need additional fire archeologists, or adjust the percentage of project area surveyed by using probabilities that artifacts/features would be present.
- Air Quality: because fuel treatments are planned events, air quality permits must be secured for prescribed fire and wildland fire use. Suppression fires are not planned events, and are exempt from air quality regulations. Recommendation is that prescribed fire and (at least) wildland fire use are exempted from air quality regulations for maintenance projects where smoke production is reduced in comparison with restoration projects. Also suggest mandatory real estate disclosures concerning wildland fire and smoke be made to people moving into WUI areas.
- Water Quality: concerns exist that larger treatments could impact whole watersheds. It is implicit that projects are designed and implemented with protection of the watershed and fisheries as a primary objective.
- Wildlife/ESA clearances: landscape-scale treatments have the potential to impact large expanses of habitat for a variety of fauna and flora. Impacts can range from negative to positive. Surveys for potential habitat and populations could be adjusted by using probabilities that habitat/species of concern are present. Models predicting positive or negative changes (either doing or withholding the treatment) to habitat/species of concern should also be employed in the decision-making process.